

ENROUTE TO MANILLA.

Lieut. Johnson, of the 49th U. S. V., Writes
While Aboard a U. S. Transport Pen
Pictures of Army Life. Mr. Paynter's
Book. Reminiscences.

(The following letter was received by Mr. John H. Paynter, of this city, who is the author of "Joining the Navy," from Lieut. E. B. Johnson an old class mate.)

Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands,

December 13, 1900.

My Dear Friend:—

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your kind favors, one of this year and one dated last year, having come to hand while I was still in the states, but at a time that I was well engaged in the military, in connection with the mobilization of our regiment, that it was next the impossible for me to make even a pretense at a reply. At one time I thought of telegraphing, but there would have been but little satisfaction in that as a matter of return for the very excellent literary gem and renewal of friendly and classical connections of years since, which you so kindly and considerately forwarded me. To say that I was pleased does not in any manner express my feeling upon the receipt of your favor. Yes, it is a fact that I have been in the service about ten (10) years, and the military has proven quite conclusively that it comes nearer being my real vocation than any thing else that I have undertaken since having left our alma mater. As unto yourself in the navy, I saw the days of small beginning, but they in their real incipency were but few. Have always been favored with good, easy and well-paying positions so far as the service would allow, and in all have had quite an extensive and profitable experience. Having entered in 1890, enlisted in the city of Boston, was forwarded to David's Island, New York Harbor, and on the first day was made company clerk in a white company of about 175 men, which was an innovation in military affairs. Remained there one year and was forwarded to Fort Shaw, Montana and engaged in the Sioux campaign, which was made the more severe on us on account of the climatic conditions.

In it I was enabled to make quite a record on account of daring in carrying messages in the enemy's territory. Upon my return my superior officers saw fit to utilize me in many ways, and at one time I was Post Sergeant Major, company clerk, quartermaster clerk and school teacher. These of themselves will exhibit without further statement that clerical material must have been at a premium, especially when consideration is given my limited capacity. Passed through four other minor Indian outbreaks and a couple of strikes, always volunteering my services for the risky part, and came out none the worse for it. Have soldiered all through the western frontier, north and south, and am not an entire stranger to the ways and customs of the inhabitants, and have not failed to pick up just a few points of the military from experience as well as from reading.

We are just entering the harbor of Honolulu, and it is also time for me to inspect my company, so I will be compelled to wave this writing until this evening, as I don't think I will go ashore.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1899.

Honolulu, a few days since did not prove to be the place at which we wanted to stop, on account of a plague having broken out there just the day

before our arrival. Our regiment is traveling on two different transports, the Warren and the Sherman. The Warren having on board our head quarters, band and two battalions started about three or four days before we did, and ran into Honolulu to coal, and the plague broke out just four hours before they were to proceed, and as there were a large number of men in the town, the ship was therefore quarantined.

Having received this information in timely season, we did not land as expected on the 13th, but proceeded that same night on this present course with the view of going to Guam, Ladrone Islands, where we expect to coal. It is believed though that we will not be able to find sufficient coal in Guam, and we all hope that we will not, for if that should be the case, it will give us an opportunity to proceed to China or Japan for coal before going to Manila. Quite true this touring the world in the manner that we are, does not appear very much like fighting the enemy, but while we are making the trip I think it just as well to make it complete, and again I don't suppose that there is such a great demand for our immediate service in the islands at the present, at any rate. This is simply an excellent trip and I am not at all particular as to how long it may last. We officers are under only a nominal expense, that of \$1.00 per diem for board, and the accommodations are such as we cannot spend any thing more, and you must be aware that we could not possibly live for anything like that on the land.

Returning to the statement concerning some of my army experience especially in the West, I must admit that I found life there most interesting, pleasing and profitable, and opine that if I were to conclude to settle in the states, in civil life, I would choose one of these sections in which I have soldiered. My soldiering has been in the 25th U. S. Infantry and the 10th U. S. Cavalry and found both branches of the service pleasing, but a preference to the former. Out of the ten years' service I have been non commissioned officer of some grade for about nine years, my grades extending from corporal to sergeant major.

When our regiment was called to the front last year, I was serving at Fort Assiniboine, Montana. We were the first of the whole army to start and the first to reach Chickamauga Park, Ga., and one of the first to land in Cuba. In passing through the South, the men were simply matters of curiosity to the people of that clime. The fleet that conveyed the Fifth Army Corps over there made the greatest naval parade in the history of the world, and I am quite sure that it is not necessary for me to send my humble efforts in an attempt to describe it to you, for I am quite certain you have read only too many glowing accounts from the pens of real writers. It was only a few days after landing before we had some actual work to perform, and the boys went at it with a spirit. On the morning of the first of July, the fight opened at 6 45, and our regiment was not called on the line until 10 45 a. m., and this was at the impregnable El Caney. The white regiments had been there all the morning literally throwing away ammunition, until finally Gen. Lawton called for that colored regiment (25th. Inf.) to come on the line. Johnnie, it would have done you good to have seen those men with regular stride advance on that block house. Coming within firing distance of the enemy they continued to

go forward on the modern system of warfare that of successive rushes. Men were wounded and killed, but there was not at any time a waver in the advancing line. This state of affairs continued until about 3 p. m., at which time we claimed El Caney as ours. It was a glorious victory and one which history cannot repeat too often in our favor.

December 18, 1899.

It would seem that it is almost impossible for me to complete this note, but I suppose that I have plenty of time inasmuch as we have no indications whatever of land and do not suppose we will have for the next week. We have crossed 180 degree and I believe that is the day that we lose a day.

That days work at El Caney was simple a slaughter to the Spaniards and I don't believe that the true story will ever be told. If there were ever any thing in this world like a Jonah, I am quite sure that I was one on that day.

I was in immediate charge of the sharpshooters, having acquired that degree years before in my service in the west. And it would seem that every man who came in close contact with me was either wounded or killed. My escape was simply miraculous and Providential. As we charged on the hill I was on the left of the column and became exposed to a fire from the little town and two block houses, from below wherein at times even now I don't know whether I did escape or not. Of 8 regiments I was the only man who had been foolish enough to expose myself and in that position the water was let out of my canteen by bullets, clothing pierced and even sweat dried on my face. Finally a sharpshooter in a tree from my left rear succeeded in hitting me in the arm breaking the bone in three places. However I did not loose much time in consequence of that for it only took a couple of minutes to sling it in a silk muffler that I had in my pocket, and continued the good word with the other arm, using my broken left as a prop. Had the arm set that night, and returned (rather stole away from the hospital) the next morning early and joined my command. This latter action gave ground for censure on the part of my immediate commanders at the time, but upon my constant refusal to return to the hospital and taking a pistol and entering the firing line the next day, directing the fire of the sharpshooter rightfully under my command the day before, I was finally very highly commended for a medal to Congress and also a commission in one of the immune regiments then about to be formed. We marched a greater portion of the night of the first, and bivouaced for a couple of hours, but finding ourselves nearer to Santiago than was intended by General Shafter, we made a turning movement and by a circuitous route joined the other forces that had done the great work at San Juan while we were at El Caney. There we had good active and lively work on the 2nd and 3rd and so on until the 14th, when actually the surrender took place. It was one of the quickest and hottest little fights that has ever been seen, demonstrating the superiority of modern tactics over those of years since. Our troops suffered more from disease than from bullets, and Montauk Point, N. Y., was a hospital in fact. There are a thousand and one little incidents that I would be pleased and will relate to you in connection with that and some of the Indian fights that I have been in, but time at the present will not permit me, but we will have a good talk when we meet, as I am of the

opinion that I will visit Washington after I shall have completed this tour of duty. Leaving Montauk Point my company was ordered to Fort Wingate, N. M., where we took station in October '93, and we remained there until the latter part of June '99 and were ordered to Manila.

In early March of this year I had been fortunate or unfortunate enough to get on a bronco and was thrown, and broke the same arm that had suffered at El Caney, leaving me in a condition that would not enable me to accompany my old command on their oriental tour, hence I accepted my discharge. I betook myself to Boston, and was opening a little business, also had begun to dabble more or less in the politics until I heard of the raising of these two regiments, the 48th and 49th. Under the then existing circumstances, it did not become a matter very difficult for me to secure a commission. Of course we are supposed to be here until June 30th, 1901, but no one knows how much sooner or how much later this "sinecure" will continue. Will probably remain as long as all continues well, still I have a great inclination for business and at the same time when I do get out of the army even for only a few days, I am at a loss and soon become discontented, no matter how pleasing the circumstances may be.

In Boston and all other cities I have simply been lorded by the patriotic and loyal people, who surely have a great appreciation for the defenders of their country, and in many cases I am of the opinion the soldier deserves all the kindly considerations that the people may see fit to give them, but not to claim anything, for no matter how well we may do, at the best we have only done our duty. I find though that the army suffers more in these tropical climates than on the western frontier in the cold and against the Indian. At this writing I am not aware of the true situation and will not be able to know much about it until after having reached the Islands, which I presume we will do in a couple of weeks at the latest. Since leaving Lincoln, I have neither met nor hear from many of our class; I did write a couple of times to Dr. Randall and also received my diploma after an elapse of 13 years.

I left Ben Cleggett in Boston, and as an exhibition of his appreciation of my former services, he has kindly presented me with a very excellent pistol for this service, and truly Johnnie, it is the finest in the regiment. He was well. On my arrival in San Francisco I met with another agreeable surprise in the personage of Tilman Brown, who has a church there and he claims to be in line for a bishopric. He was very desirous of becoming chaplain of this regiment, but I don't know it will all turn out, as there are a great number of aspirants. The majority of the ministers seem quite willing to leave their churches to accept of a position as chaplain of any of these regiments. He visited camp several times and also gave the officers of the regiment a grand reception at his church. I found it impracticable to attend as military duty invited my attention at the camp that night, and while I was not compelled to remain and would have been pleased to attend, still the military is the channel through which I am living at the present.

Relative to your excellent work—"Joining the Navy"—it does me proud to state that I have long since been the

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